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SUBJECT: GAZA AID CONFERENCE HELD IN ABU DHABI

REF: A) ABU DHABI 34, B) ABU DHABI 20, C) ABU DHABI 17, D) 08 ABU DHABI 1467

¶1. As noted Ref A, UAE Deputy Prime Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed, who is head of the UAE Red Crescent Authority (RCA) and Chairman of the UAEG's Foreign Aid Coordination Committee, called an emergency meeting of donor countries and international relief organizations to discuss Gaza on January 12. Under the banner of "Donors Meeting -- Humanitarian Situation in Gaza Strip," about 40 embassies and 20 aid agencies discussed key humanitarian priorities.

¶2. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Anwar Gargash chaired the main session, citing the urgency of "all forms" of humanitarian relief, both immediate and in preparation for the "day after" a cessation of hostilities. Reviewing UAE contributions (see Ref A), he noted in particular 318 million dirham raised in a weekend telethon, a commitment to rebuild 1300 houses (and select mosques), and ongoing RCA donations. Gargash commended the broad variety of donors who need to "stand together, not stand still." Gaza's "unspeakable suffering" requires coordinated and concrete efforts by countries, NGOs, and individuals. He praised humanitarian relief workers -- the "unsung heroes for an area that has suffered too long" -- and cited his own visits to Gaza in "happier times" which he hoped would return.

¶3. Briefings by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNRWA, and the ICRC put the crisis in context with references to an 18-month blockade preceding military operations, difficult circumstances for aid delivery, and intense need for electricity, fuel, shelter, water, food, medicine, and cash. Each organization characterized its projected requirements (as did the WFP in its intervention) and noted that cash is preferable to in-kind assistance. (UNRWA referred to the withholding of cash, or the "Israeli cash weapon," as crippling the Gaza economy.) These needs transcend the immediate crisis and will be compounded by "day after" requirements for trauma counseling, housing, infrastructure rebuilding, school supplies, job creation, and sanitation. The dilemma is "as basic and as tragic" as a family that cannot afford a funeral, noted the UNRWA representative. The Ambassador's intervention focused on U.S. support for UNRWA, WFP, and ICRC (drawing on Department fact sheets).

¶4. All briefers expressed appreciation for the UAEG's initiative in mobilizing (and funding) relief efforts. Many interventions expressed similar thanks to the UAEG and noted country-specific commitments. (Interventions were made by the Czech, Jordanian, Norwegian, Syrian, and U.S. ambassadors, as well as representatives from WFP, Dubai Cares, UNICEF, and UNOPS). Dr. Gargash concluded by noting that a summary of the proceedings would be prepared and inviting participants to continue the conversation with Sheikh Hamdan later that evening.

¶5. The Ambassador joined the evening discussion with Sheikh Hamdan, which was an opportunity to reinforce the themes of the conference and express solidarity with the humanitarian needs of Gaza. One UN

participant told the Ambassador that as a means of encouraging increased donations to the UN system from donor (and particularly Gulf) countries, the "donor conference" was certainly welcome.

¶6. Comment: By focusing the collective minds of a group of donors and agencies on issues that each is individually seized with already, the meeting was a welcome reminder of the massive effort underway and the even more massive requirements on the horizon. It also clearly identified cash contributions to UN agencies (UNRWA in particular) and the Red Crescent as the more efficient means of getting aid resources applied where most needed. End comment.

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